

courtesy of Dr. Amadon, supported in part by a travel grant from the Chapman Memorial Fund. Specimens were also studied at the Chicago Natural History Museum, Peabody Museum of Natural History at Yale University, United States National Museum, and Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, with the kind co-operation of the authorities of those institutions.

On the breeding of *Lamprotornis mevesii* (Wahlberg)

by R. K. BROOKE

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The only original observations on the breeding of *Lamprotornis mevesii* are contained in Benson (1944 and 1953) and Jubb (1952). From these we learn that it nests during the rains in holes in trees (Acacias, Baobabs, Mopane and Palms) and that the one egg collected is plain pale blue and measures 28.5 x 20 mm. A number of breeding records, mostly from Rhodesia, are now available which round out this rather scanty picture (see Table).

Records 11, 12 and 13 were in adjacent trees. It would appear that Jubb's (1952) record of three nests in one tree is not normal behaviour but, rather, symptomatic of the opportunist tendencies of starlings. They seem indifferent whether the hole is in live or dead wood or whether the entrance is underneath a branch or on the side of a trunk.

Dr. C. R. Saunders has written to me about record no. 16 which is now in his collection and has made some interesting points in connection with the species which I now quote. "Nest lined with a few leaves and bits of dead fibre. Eggs a rather washed out greeny-blue and not at all like those of *L. chloropterus* and *L. chalybaeus* which are a far deeper and richer blue. Immaculate but heavily nest-stained. Moderately incubated.

"It seems to be resident throughout the year at Chiredzi. At Dennis Townley's on the Devure River small parties are fed at his front window on fruit and they definitely move out at the commencement of the rains when the flocks break up into pairs and do not return to his garden until early winter. They migrate to breed a few miles away.

"A pair has bred for the last two years in a black thorn tree opposite my driveway (at Chiredzi). This nest is in a broken off branch hollow about 20 feet from the ground. They produced two young last year and again this year breeding in February and exhibiting their young on our lawn in late March. For about three weeks after leaving the nest the young are conspicuous by their short tails. A pair nested in January 1964 in a broken off branch of a thorn tree on the banks of the Chiredzi River. This nest was inaccessible, but like the others I have seen was certainly neither in a colony nor on the under side of the branch.

"They sleep in a thickly foliaged tree right outside my bedroom and though they are active and noisy at roosting time they could hardly be called acrobatic. They frequently wake up at night and 'churr' away shrilly."

The table supports Saunders' comments on *L. mevesii* being a rainy season breeder. Praed and Grant (1963) write "Recorded breeding: Northern Rhodesia, October and November. Nyasaland, October to February. Southern Rhodesia, December to February. The references to October and November are apparently based on Priest's (1936) honest

TABLE—Breeding records of *Lamprotornis mevesii*

Date	Place	Recorder	Clutch	Egg size	Nest site	Source
1. 22. 4.06	Mossamedes, Angola	W. J. Ansonge	3y			Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.
2. 3. 2.43	Fort Johnston, Malawi	C. W. Benson	1	28.5 x 20	<i>Adansonia digitata</i>	Benson, 1944
3. 15.12. ?	Ntakitataka, Malawi	C. W. Benson	bldg.		<i>Hyphaene</i>	Benson, 1953
4. 7. 3. ?	Ntakitataka, Malawi	C. W. Benson	yy		<i>Colophospermum mopane</i>	Benson, 1953
5. 22. 1.51	Sabi Valley, Rhodesia	R. A. Jubb	yy		<i>Acacia</i> sp. <i>tortilis</i> ?	Jubb, 1952
6. 22. 1.51	Sabi Valley, Rhodesia	R. A. Jubb	yy		<i>Acacia</i> sp. <i>tortilis</i> ?	Jubb, 1952
7. 22. 1.51	Sabi Valley, Rhodesia	R. A. Jubb	yy		<i>Acacia</i> sp. <i>tortilis</i> ?	Jubb, 1952
8. 21. 2.53	Nuanetsi, Rhodesia	A. D. Gosling	4	25-24 x 20-19.5	<i>Acacia</i> woodpecker's hole	Rho. Ornith. Society
9. 15. 2.61	Lochinvar, Zambia	C. W. Benson	volking oocyte 8 x 7			
10. 13. 3.61	Kariba, Rhodesia	G. F. T. Child	3		<i>C. mopane</i> 1.5 ft. from ground	Benson, pers. comm.
11. 22. 1.64	Sabi Valley, Rhodesia	K. E. Cackett	2y		<i>Combretum imberbe</i> natural hole	Rho. Ornith. Society
12. 22. 1.64	Sabi Valley, Rhodesia	K. E. Cackett	yy		<i>Combretum imberbe</i> natural hole	Rho. Ornith. Society
13. 22. 1.64	Sabi Valley, Rhodesia	K. E. Cackett	yy		<i>Combretum imberbe</i> natural hole	Rho. Ornith. Society
14. 22. 1.64	Sabi Valley, Rhodesia	K. E. Cackett	yy	3 x 30 x 20	<i>Combretum imberbe</i> natural hole	Rho. Ornith. Society
15. 30. 1.64	Bubye River, Rhodesia	K. E. Cackett	3		dead tree natural hole	Rho. Ornith. Society
16. 24. 2.64	Chiredzi, Rhodesia	A. Savory and C. R. Saunders	yy	26.2 x 19 25.8 x 18.6 25 x 18.2	<i>Combretum</i> sp. natural hole dead <i>C. mopane</i> natural hole	Rho. Ornith. Society
17. ? 3.64	Sabi Valley, Rhodesia	K. E. Cackett	yy		ventilation shaft	Cackett pers. comm.

Breeding season: Dec. 4, Jan. 5, Feb. 8, March 2.

comment "I have never found a nest as I have not been in the locality when, I expect, they breed in October and November."

No nests have yet been recorded from Zambia but C. W. Benson (*in litt.*) shot a ♀ at Lochinvar on 15th February, 1961 which contained a yolking oocyte (record no. 9). I am also indebted to Mr. Benson for telling me of record no. 1.

The species inhabits chiefly dry deciduous woodlands dominated by *Colophospermum mopane* and by *Acacia* spp. However, it is not uniformly distributed. It is hardly ever found except on flat ground. K. E. Cackett of the Ministry of Agriculture tells me that in south-eastern Rhodesia he has only found it on alluvial soils and makes a number of other interesting points.

His record no. 14 was of eggs taken from a hole formed by a branch breaking away and containing a cup of grass with no feathers at all. Brooding parents were observed to back into their nest holes presumably because their long tails cannot be managed in any other way. He found that the species showed little sign of territorial behaviour or tendency to separate into obvious pairs but that on two occasions in September, when they were not breeding, they objected strongly to the Lilac-breasted Roller *Coracias caudatus* prospecting holes for possible nest sites. When inspecting nest no. 11 all the available *L. mevesii* joined in mobbing him.

To recapitulate, *L. mevesii* lays up to four faded plain blue eggs averaging 27.2 x 19.5 mm. in natural or artificial holes during the wet months December to March. The nest is a cup of dead vegetable matter without feathers.

References:

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A pair of wild-shot Mallard x Gadwall from the Solway

by JAMES M. and JEFFERY G. HARRISON

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In February, 1907, a pair of hybrid duck was shot at Skinburyness, Solway Firth, Cumberland by William Nichol, a noted wildfowler-naturalist.

The history is that this pair of birds had been observed by the shooter several times and he had identified them as hybrids between the Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos* Linnaeus and the Gadwall, *Anas strepera* Linnaeus, an observation of considerable acumen. Both birds in the field would attract the attention of a keen and knowledgeable wildfowler, whose first impression would be that they were Gadwall, for overall both resemble that species very closely.

With any less acute observer that is probably as far as a field identification would have gone, but Mr. Nichol had recognised that they were sufficiently different from Gadwall to merit further attention, so he collected both and in due course they found their way into the Carlisle Museum collection.